

THE WILD CHIHUAHUAS OF MEXICO

*THE AMAZING TALE OF HOW A PACK OF WILD
CHIHUAHUAS HELPED WIN THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION*

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Although this book is based on facts and historical accounts of the Mexican Revolution, it is a work of fiction and many names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination.

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Summary: A pack of wild Chihuahuas, lead by alpha dog Lola, journeys across the Chihuahuan Desert in search of Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution. Along the way the dogs learn important lessons about leadership.

1. Dogs-Fiction. 2. Chihuahuas-Fiction. 3. Mexico-Fiction. 4. Mexican Revolution-Fiction. 5. Pancho Villa-Fiction.

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FOREWORD

This story springs from the little-known fact that many years ago small, wild dogs roamed through the deserts of Chihuahua, Mexico.

Chihuahua, the largest of Mexico's thirty-one states, is famous for many things. The spectacular Copper Canyon in the Sierra Madre Mountains, for example, is a geological wonder that rivals Arizona's Grand Canyon. Chihuahua is also famous as the home of Mexico's revolutionary leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920, Pancho Villa fought against the Mexican government in the country's north while his *compadre* Emiliano Zapata fought in the south. Both revolutionaries wanted to empower Mexican *campesinos*, forced to work for little money on the *haciendas* of the wealthy landowners. In fact, a fascinating bit of history involves the Sierra Madre Mountains, Pancho Villa, and a pack of wild Chihuahuas.

By now you may be shaking your head, saying that Chihuahuas are tiny dogs with mighty personalities, often pampered by their owners and even dressed in silly outfits. What could these yapping lapdogs possibly have to do with the Sierra Madre Mountains and Pancho Villa? Read this book and you will find out. Once you finish, you may say this story is too far-fetched and there is no way of knowing if it is true.

I can only say, there is no way of knowing that it's not.

Traude Gomez Rhine

April 1916

Chihuahua, Mexico

CHAPTER ONE

Ten small dogs gathered on the cliff and stared down at the village that lay in the valley beneath them. With her eagle eyes, Lola, the leader of the pack, watched puffs of smoke rising from chimneys atop several of the small adobe huts. A swirl of colorful activity danced before her eyes. The villagers were busy this morning; women hung laundry on clotheslines and swept courtyards, and groups of children were running around playing. Chickens clucked in the courtyards and a donkey tied to a fence post brayed. Poor and simple, this village looked just like the last one the dogs had raided, but this time Lola felt sure they would make off like bandits. The dogs would not be beaten back with sticks and brooms.

“Those villagers won’t know what happened when we charge in running and barking,” Lola told the other dogs who huddled around her. “They’ll rue the day that we took them by storm.”

Lola suddenly caught a whiff of something that made her sit up straighter. She sniffed the breeze and the wonderful smell of fresh salty pork filled her nose. Someone had recently killed a pig. She quickly scanned the village below, almost frantic; on a wood fence that ran alongside of one hut, she spotted a string of sausages dangling from a post. Lola’s sharp eyes zeroed in like a circling hawk’s on a mouse. The hunger that she had tried to ignore came roaring back to life. Her mouth began to water.

“We’ll be lucky today,” Lola said, but she kept her discovery quiet so that she could surprise the pack later. “We’ll find plenty of meat and eat until our bellies are round and fat.”

She puffed out her chest and tried to look brave for the other dogs, whose tails drooped between their legs, and whose sharp rib bones poked through their matted fur.

What a sorry bunch, Lola thought. *So hungry and beaten down from too many days of not enough food*. Her black whiskers twitched as they always did when she was nervous. *I'll get those sausages if it's the last thing I do*.

"You'd better not take us on another wild-goose chase," grunted Joaquín, a dusty black Chihuahua with long spindly legs. His rough gray tongue hung from his mouth, parched from the heat like an old piece of leather.

"Chili's looking really bad," Joaquín continued. "I'm surprised he's still alive. He needs more to eat than the scrawny lizards we've come across. We didn't find any food in that last village raid, just got chased by angry people with sticks. You'd better make this raid work or the dogs will suffer even more."

Lola glanced at poor Chili. The old gray Chihuahua had been with the pack longer than Lola herself, even longer than her *padre*. His short legs wobbled and his sad face slumped against his grizzled chest. A fly buzzed about his head as if it sensed he would soon fall over. Lola swallowed hard. Joaquín was right; Chili looked terrible.

"I'm okay, Lola," Chili said, trying to stand taller on his trembling legs. "This raid will be a success; I feel it in my bones. Lead the way and I'll bite the ankle of any foot that tries to stop us from getting meat."

Lola couldn't bear to let Chili down, but she was not at all sure the dogs could scare the villagers and steal the meat as they had once so bravely done. Mexico's legendary Chihuahua raids—with hundreds of dogs overrunning villages, baring their dangerous teeth, and frightening everyone in sight—were over. Lola remembered running beside her *padre* in one such exciting raid just outside of Chihuahua City. It was a story the villagers would tell around their campfires for years to come—hundreds of frenzied, attacking Chihuahuas! The dogs made off with a dozen roasted chickens that they gobbled up beneath a full moon.

What a fiesta they had, howling along with the coyotes until daybreak. Lola decided that night that she would someday lead the pack, even though she was a girl. Her *padre*, Cuauhtémoc, had said that she could do it, that she was brave and smart and strong.

But now the pack was smaller than ever—no longer hundreds of dogs strong, it numbered less than one hundred, less than fifty. Just ten miserable, starved, and half-mad dogs remained. Three dogs had been lost in the past week alone. Two had simply wandered away and one died from the blazing heat and starvation. Chili's cousin Don Diego had just fallen over in the dirt and was instantly swarmed by flies.

Lola and Dolores helped Chili bury Don Diego in the shallow grave he sadly dug with his paws, but the other dogs had trotted on as they could not bear to watch.

Worse than the pack's small size was its gloomy mood. Times were hard for the wild Chihuahuas. Some villages were nearly empty as so many men had gone off to fight with the great revolutionary leader Pancho Villa. It seemed that all those who remained were practically starving—the old men, the women and children, the dogs and donkeys, the iguanas and lizards; everyone and everything left behind was skinny and scrawny.

But the good times were coming back; Lola could feel it in her bones. If only the dogs could stick it out a little longer. Surely the fighting would soon stop, the men would return, and the villages would be filled with food once again.

“Chili, stay here and we'll bring back meat,” Lola said calmly, though her heart was beating as fast as a butterfly's wings. “Keep Dolores company.”

Lola nodded toward the pack's oldest dog, the fragile but regal Dolores, whose long once-glamorous red fur was covered with burrs. Even as the dogs limped through the dusty desert, Dolores held her head high as if she were a royal dog who belonged in an ancient Aztec temple. Lola knew about the Aztec kings and their royal dogs because sometimes at night Dolores told the dogs stories about these special Chihuahuas who lived among the ancient Aztecs. Lola marveled that Dolores knew so much about these people and their special dogs who had vanished from Mexico six centuries before.

“So sorry to be such trouble. It used to be me who ran in front of the pack, when I was young and strong . . .” Chili's voice trailed off, and his sad head hung even lower.

“You were certainly among the bravest of dogs,” Dolores said, her warm brown eyes filled with kindness. “But we've had our glory, Chili. Let's leave the raiding to the young dogs, and us old dogs shall rest beneath the cactus.”

“Lola won’t let us down,” Chili said as he collapsed in the dirt. “And after I have a little food and get some rest I’ll feel good as new. I’ll join you on the next raid, Lola. Just you wait and see.”

“This will be a great raid,” Lola said, though she knew her words sounded hollow. Still, those dangling sausages were a good omen—a good omen, indeed.

Joaquín shook his head. “I’ll believe it when I see it,” he sneered.

With that, before Joaquín could say another word, Lola took off running down the hill. She would never let Joaquín steal her pack. Never.

“Run, run,” she barked at the other dogs trailing behind her. “We’re fierce, we’re proud, we’re the wild Chihuahuas of Mexico!”

The dogs swarmed down the road leading to the village barking their war cries as if they themselves were a band of Aztec warriors.

“Better watch out because here I come,” barked Bombom, a fuzzy white Chihuahua with a patch of black fur circling one eye. Intensely loyal, Bombom was always just inches from Lola’s side.

“I’m going to steal all your stinkin’ food,” barked Pedro, Bombom’s cousin who was all black with a white patch around his eye. Pedro could not resist using the word “stinkin” in every sentence he uttered.

As the dogs burst into the *zócalo*, a clutch of women scattered into their huts.

With the dogs causing a ruckus and distracting the villagers, Lola began scouting for her treasure. Her nose led the way, hot on the scent of the salty pork. She ran along the village’s narrow dirt paths, sending chickens squawking and jumping out of her way. She passed the bored-looking donkey tied to a post.

“We’re the wild Chihuahuas of Mexico!” she barked.

The donkey hardly blinked an eye and swatted at some flies with his tail.

Suit yourself, Lola thought, annoyed that the donkey had not been impressed. There was a time when the village animals would cheer as the dogs ran through. The Chihuahuas never harmed another animal; that was a cardinal rule.

Lola rounded a corner and came upon the fence she had spied from the hillside. The long string of sausages hung down, glistening in the sunlight. Her heart soared. The strand was longer than she had thought. She quickly counted—twelve sausages, one for each dog and then some! She had saved the pack! Lola’s tail began wagging furiously with great relief.

Lola jumped up to snatch the sausages but she fell back to the ground with a thump, her teeth clattering and her mouth still empty.

“Yiyiyi!” she yelped. The fence was higher than she had figured. Lola’s head began to spin. She would just have to jump higher. She lowered her body to the ground and focused on the prize.

You can do it! she told herself. *You’re Lola, the bravest, strongest, and smartest Chihuahua this side of the Sierra Madres.*

At that moment, from the corner of her eye, Lola spied an old woman charging toward her with a broom.

“You’ll be sorry, you disgusting desert rat,” the old woman screamed, her long silver braid flipping around her head. “Wild dogs are not tolerated! Neither are bandits!”

Holy tamale! The old *abuelas* were the meanest. They would gladly kill a dog, throw it in the pot with the chicken, and then cackle with the other *abuelas* sitting round the fire. Lola had seconds to reach those sausages. She jumped, missed again, and came down even harder. Her skinny legs buckled. *I’m too weak from not eating.* She was seized by panic as it hit her that she might not get the sausages after all.

The old woman was by now whirling about and smacking her broom in all directions, a furious tornado. Lola knew she had time for one last jump—one last chance to get the sausages, to save her Chihuahuas, to be a hero.

“I am Lola, leader of the wild Chihuahuas of Mexico,” she barked.

And with every last ounce of energy, as if her life depended on her strength, because it did, Lola jumped at the dangling sausages.

Dear Virgin of Guadalupe, help me, she prayed in midair. *Save my dogs.*

Her jaw sunk into something soft and salty. Her body hung in space, suspended, as if she were just one more sausage on the row.

The old woman was so close Lola could smell her sour odor, the powerful mix of tobacco, onions, and *copal*, with a heavy dose of sweat. Lola paddled her legs in space. She kicked against the fence. The old woman was howling now like a hyena, displaying a full set of blackened teeth, coming in for the kill.

Down Lola fell. She hit the ground in the shadow of the broom as the old woman aimed for her head. But Lola ran like the wind. She wanted to warn the other dogs to run away but she could not risk dropping the sausages. With luck, the other dogs had taken what they could get and were headed back up the hill.

On the way out of the village, she passed Donkey once again.

“Go, little dog!” he brayed, swishing his tail back and forth and grinning wide to display a row of perfect white teeth.